

What Is Claimed Is:

1. A system for using a voice mail message to provide availability information of a calling party to a called party, comprising:

a private branch exchange (PBX) serving telephones of the calling and called parties;

a presence server connected to an information device of the calling party and detecting presence of the calling party; and

a communications path between said PBX and said presence server, allowing presence information to be sent from said presence server to said PBX.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein said presence server comprises:

a presence detection module that can receive a presence indication from said information device of the calling party; and

an activity database that maintains availability information regarding the calling party, wherein said availability information is updated by said presence detection module.

3. The system of claim 2, wherein said presence server further comprises:

a timing module that measures the time elapsed since a last presence indication, is reset by said presence detection module when said presence detection module receives said presence indication from the calling party, and updates said activity database if not reset within a defined period.

4. The system of claim 2, wherein said presence indication is generated explicitly by the calling party through a deliberate action to indicate presence of the calling party.

5. The system of claim 1, wherein said PBX and said presence server are embodied as a single device.

6. A voice messaging system, comprising:
means for receiving presence information about a calling party from an
information device associated with said calling party;
means for associating said presence information with a voice message left
by said calling party; and
means for providing said presence information to a called party in
connection with playback of said voice message.

7. A method of using a voice mail message to provide availability
information of a calling party to a called party, comprising the following steps
performed after the calling party has left a voice mail message for the called party:

(a) receiving availability information regarding the calling party
from a presence server; and
(b) including the availability information in the voice mail
message.

8. The method of claim 7, further comprising the following step,
performed before step (a):

(c) determining the presence of the calling party.

9. The method of claim 8 wherein said step (c) comprises:
i. detecting whether there has been activity on the part of the
calling party within a defined period;
ii. when activity is detected within the defined period,
indicating that the calling party is likely to be present; and

iii. when no activity has been detected within the defined period, indicating that the calling party is not likely to be present.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein said step i. comprises sensing use of an information device of the calling party.

5 11. The method of claim 8, wherein said step (c) comprises detecting a deliberate action by the calling party, wherein the action explicitly indicates presence.

12. The method of claim 7, further comprising the following step, performed before step (a):

10 (c) querying the presence server regarding the availability of the calling party.

13. The method of claim 7, further comprising the following step, performed before step (a):

15 (c) associating the calling party with the voice mail message left by the calling party.

14. A method for conveying presence information via voice mail, comprising:

(a) receiving presence information about a calling party from an information device associated with the calling party; and

20 (b) associating the presence information with the calling party.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein said step (b) comprises:
associating the presence information with the calling party so that the presence information is provided to a called party in connection with playback of the voice message.

16. The method of claim 14, further comprising the following step,
performed before said step (a):

(c) querying the information device for presence information.

17. The method of claim 14, further comprising the following step,
performed before said step (a):

(c) in response to the called party requesting playback of the
voice message, querying the information device for presence information.

18. The method of claim 14, wherein the presence information is
received as a result of activity by the calling party.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein the activity comprises a deliberate
action by the calling party to explicitly indicate presence.

20. A computer program product comprising a computer usable
medium having computer readable program code means embodied in said medium
for causing an application program to execute on a computer that detects
availability of a calling party, said computer readable program code means
comprising:

first computer readable program code means for causing a computer to
detect activity on the part of the calling party;

second computer readable program code means for causing the computer
to indicate that the calling party is likely to be present, if activity is detected; and

third computer readable program code means for causing the computer to
indicate that the calling party is likely to be absent, if activity is not detected.

21. The computer program product of claim 20, wherein
said first computer readable program code means causes the computer to
detect activity on the part of the calling party within a defined period;

said second computer readable program code means causes the computer to indicate that the calling party is likely to be present, if activity is detected within the defined period; and

said third computer readable program code means causes the computer to indicate that the calling party is likely to be absent, if activity is not detected within the defined period.

22. A computer program product comprising a computer usable medium having computer readable program code means embodied in said medium for causing an application program to execute on a computer that provides availability information of a calling party to a called party through a voice mail message, said computer readable program code means comprising:

first computer readable program code means for causing a private branch exchange (PBX) to receive availability information from a presence server; and

second computer readable program code means for causing the PBX to include the received availability information in the voice mail message.

23. The computer program product of claim 22, wherein said computer readable program code means further comprises:

third computer readable program code means for causing the PBX to query the presence server regarding the availability of the calling party.